

Nevada Proficiency Examination Program

Frequently Asked Questions

Nevada Department of Education (NDE)
Office of Assessment, Program Accountability, Curriculum (APAC)
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Test Construction

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Q: What does CRT stand for?

A: Criterion-Referenced Test. The CRT is a standardized, standards-based assessment and is a “snapshot” of student performance at one point in time (i.e., summative).

Q: What does HSPE stand for?

A: High School Proficiency Exam. The HSPE is also a standardized, summative, standards-based assessment.

Q: How are the CRT and HSPE constructed?

A: The CRT and HSPE are constructed over a 2 to 3 year timeframe. The process includes all steps from question/item writing and form/version assembly to field testing and evaluation of results. A brief summary of the test development process is provided here.

- First, test questions - or items - for the CRT/HSPE are drafted by Nevada educators. Groups of grade-level experts who are Nevada teachers and content specialists write items/questions to be aligned to grade-specific Nevada Content Standards. They use item

specifications to guide their work. Item specifications are available online at http://nde.doe.nv.gov/Assessment_CRT.htm and http://nde.doe.nv.gov/Assessment_HSPE.htm.

- Next, WestEd (www.wested.org), a nationally recognized testing company reviews, edits and revises the draft items. WestEd follows Nevada’s test design for each content and grade level to create the assessment forms. These forms represent the breadth and depth of necessary content by sampling the Nevada Content Standards.
- All test questions/items and test forms are evaluated carefully. Evaluations are conducted by WestEd, Measured Progress (the test vendor), NDE (<http://nde.doe.nv.gov/APAC.htm>), and an outside evaluator. Content and bias reviews identify potentially problematic questions/items and result in edits (see below). All test questions/items are administered to Nevada students (see below), and statistical information from students’ performance is used to evaluate each test question/item and each test form.

Q: What are “field test” items/questions?

A: Prior to any item/question appearing on the NPEP, it is first field tested to ensure valid and reliable assessments.

- Field testing items/questions allow for item characteristics – statistical information about how Nevada students did on the items/questions – to be taken into account when creating the operational or “live” forms.
- Operational forms, or versions, include those questions/items that count towards a student’s score.
- Items that do not meet Nevada’s parameters are not used as “live” items/questions.
- There are field test items/questions on all NPEP assessments except for High School Retests. Field test items/questions do not count towards a student’s score.

Q: What is Bias Review?

A: Reading passages, writing prompts, and test items/questions go through a ‘Bias Review’ process to ensure valid and reliable assessments.

- A committee of community representatives and grade appropriate educators review passages, writing prompts, and items/questions for bias.
- Bias review committee members receive training on assessment expectations and bias definitions used by the State.
- The committee provides feedback to the State on the potential use of passages, writing prompts, and items/questions.
- For Nevada bias definitions, please contact Cindy Sharp at csharp@doe.nv.gov.

Before Testing

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Q: If a student has all the credits necessary to graduate but has not passed the HSPE, can a student still get a diploma?

A: Yes. Students that still need to pass one or more content areas of the HSPE can enroll in an Adult Education program and, after appropriate remediation, continue to take the exam during regular testing windows.

Q: Can home schooled students participate in the CRT/HSPE?

A: Yes. Home schooled students should contact the district office in their area to make arrangements to test with other students during regular testing windows. Public schools are not required to accommodate home schooled students but are usually happy to help. If arrangements cannot be made with a local school, home schooled students should contact their district office or the Department of Education.

Q: Can foreign exchange students take the CRT/HSPE?

A: Yes. The Nevada Department of Education encourages foreign exchange students participate in testing, however, a foreign exchange student will be removed from AYP calculations.

Q: Can private school students participate in the HSPE?

A: Yes. Private schools should contact the Department of Education and make arrangements to participate in the necessary pre-test training. Private schools are held to the same administration requirements as public schools. There is no cost to participate in the program.

Q: Can students who have passed a high school proficiency test in another state be exempt from the Nevada HSPE?

A: No. Currently, Nevada does not have reciprocity with other states for High School Proficiency Examinations.

Assessment Materials

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Q: What if there are missing materials with a CRT/HSPE shipment?

A: Contact the **Measured Progress Service Center at 866-651-0126** to get anything you need. If you get an answering machine, be sure to leave a detailed message, and the appropriate person will get back in touch with you.

Q: If enrollment has changed, how can additional materials be ordered?

A: If you have received some materials from Measured Progress but you need more, and you are still within the online ordering window, simply log in to the Measured Progress website and place an order for additional materials. If you are outside the online ordering window, call the Nevada Service Center at 866.651.0126 and order materials. If you reach a machine, please leave a detailed message and the appropriate person will get back in touch with you.

Q: Why does Measured Progress send so many boxes?

A: Measured Progress has a systematic process for tracking secure materials that ensures that the material handling and data flow smoothly.

Q: Why do materials come from and get shipped back to New Hampshire?

A: According to NRS 389.015, the CRT/HSPE must be "...printed and scored by a nationally recognized testing company in accordance with the process established by the testing company." Nevada's testing company, Measured Progress, is located in New Hampshire.

During Testing: Administration of the Assessments

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Q: What if a student becomes sick during testing?

A: If students cannot complete testing for any reason, simply submit their answer documents "as is." There is no need to "invalidate" the document. If the student is able to resume taking the test before the end of the testing window, he/she may continue on subject areas or parts of the test that they have not been exposed to yet.

Q: What if there is a fire drill or other emergency?

A: Districts and schools should have "Test Security Plans" in place for emergency situations.

Q: Can a student use a highlighter/colored pencil in their test booklet?

A: Yes. See *Procedures for the Nevada Proficiency Examination Program*, "Test Security," "An Appropriate Testing Environment."

Q: Can a student use a highlighter/colored pencil on the answer document?

A: No. Students must use No. 2 pencils **only** on their answer documents.

After Testing

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Q: How are results reported?

A: Reports of test results include student reports, roster and aggregate reports at the district and school level, item-level reports provided to districts, and summary reports. Test results are used for accountability reports, reports to the US Department of Education, and other interested parties. The process of developing the CRT/HSPE reports is described briefly here.

- First, early in the school year, the population of students who will test is created to ensure that the results will be reported to the right schools and districts.
- After administration of the tests, Measured Progress, the test vendor, completes extensive statistical evaluation of the test results before reporting them to school districts.

- Electronic results are made available online three or four weeks after materials are returned to Measured Progress, depending on equating status.
- Printed “Individual Student Reports” (sometimes called “Parent Letters”) are shipped to Nevada approximately one week after the final round of results become available.

Q: What is the test scale?

A: The test scale is the metric used to report the test results.

- Just as a thermometer reports temperature on a scale, Nevada’s CRT and HSPE test results are reported on a scale from 100 to 500 points.
- This scale was developed using industry-standard methods (see below).

Q: Why are “scale scores” reported?

A: Nevada tests results are reported as scale scores.

- Raw scores, number correct, or percent correct scores cannot be used because they are dependent on the particular population of students that took that test in *one* year.
- Scale scores allow us to make year-to-year comparisons *within one grade/content area*. For example, you can legitimately compare Grade 3 scores in Math in 2007 to Grade 3 scores in Math in 2008. With the test scale, such comparisons are valid and reliable.
- Scale scores allow for yearly “equating” of test forms/versions (see below).
- The “Raw Score to Scale Score Conversion Chart” (see below) is an outcome of the equating process that allows for consistent cut scores and reporting metrics across different administrations and versions of the exams.

Q: What is “equating”?

A: Since no two versions of a test are completely equal, equating is the statistical process which allows for comparisons to be made.

- One of the primary outcomes of this work is a “Raw Score to Scale Score Conversion Chart.” This chart allows for the same cut score to be used to determine proficiency levels year to year, providing comparability and consistency over time.
- By equating the test, we can improve test security while providing valid and reliable results. Measured Progress, the test vendor, and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, an outside evaluator, evaluate the equating results statistically to ensure quality.

General Assessment Topics

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Q: What types of item/questions are on the CRT/HSPE?

A: Multiple choice and constructed response items/questions.

- A multiple choice item/question will have four answers choices.
- Constructed response items/questions allow students to write, show their work, and/or explain their thinking.
- There are no constructed response items in grade 3 or high school.

Q: Where can I find sample item/questions for the CRT/HSPE?

A: On the Department of Education's website (<http://nde.doe.nv.gov>), you will find "Instructional Materials."

- For "Instructional Materials" for the CRT, go to http://nde.doe.nv.gov/Assessment_CRT.htm.
- For "Instructional Materials" for the HSPE, go to http://nde.doe.nv.gov/Assessment_HSPE.htm.

Q: Do the instructional materials identify the specific standards used to develop district interim tests?

A: No.

Q: Do the instructional materials create parallel tests aligned to district semester exams?

A: No.

Q: Are the CRT/HSPE timed?

A: No.

Q: Is there only one version of the test?

A: No.

Q: Who scores the test?

A: Measured Progress is Nevada's CRT/HSPE testing vendor. They are responsible for scoring the test through scanning bubbled responses and scoring constructed response questions/items.

Q: May students write in the test booklet?

A: Yes.

Q: How can I support my students to do their best on the CRT/HSPE?

A: Many factors influence student performance. However, strong curriculum and instruction are known to be the most powerful factors driving students' success on standardized tests.

- Teach to the Nevada Academic Content Standards.
- Teach the vocabulary of the Nevada Academic Content Standards and assessment terminology so students are familiar with this language.

Q: Why can we move the CRT/HSPE testing dates to later in the school year so that students can be exposed to more of the curriculum before taking the test?

A: The Nevada legislature mandated the testing window. NDE does not have the authority to change the testing windows.

Q: For our IEP students, would it be permissible to separate the test so that it can be administered page by page?

A: No. Students are expected to take each part of the test from beginning to end without interruption. However, NDE will review requests for unique accommodation on a case-by-case basis.

Q: Who develops and makes changes to the test matrices?

A: The assessment matrices, for all content areas, are developed and reviewed collaboratively by NDE and WestEd.

- For CRT test matrix, go to http://nde.doe.nv.gov/Assessment_CRT.htm.
- For the HSPE test matrix, go to http://nde.doe.nv.gov/Assessment_HSPE.htm.

Q: What is an appropriate testing environment during CRT/HSPE testing?

A: See *Procedures for the Nevada Proficiency Examination Program*, “Test Security,” “An Appropriate Testing Environment.”

Q: Can a teacher create a Test-Taking Strategy Poster that includes items from the FAQ document and leave it up during testing?

A: See *Procedures for the Nevada Proficiency Examination Program*, “Test Security,” “An Appropriate Testing Environment.”

Q: Does the state have to make AYP?

A: No.

Constructed Responses Items/Questions

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Q: Are constructed response questions worth more than multiple choice questions?

A: Constructed response questions can contribute up to 3 points to a student’s score. Multiple choice questions can contribute up to 1 point to a student’s score.

Q: How do I get my students prepared for the constructed response questions?

A: See the “Instructional Materials.”

- For “Instructional Materials” for the CRT, go to http://nde.doe.nv.gov/Assessment_CRT.htm.
- For “Instructional Materials” for the HSPE, go to http://nde.doe.nv.gov/Assessment_HSPE.htm.
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Q: Does spelling count in the scoring of the constructed response?

A: No.

Q: Does sentence construction count in the scoring of the constructed response?

A: No.

Q: Must the student fill the entire answer page to receive a good score?

A: No.

Q: Can I look at or/review student responses during the assessment?

A: No.

Q: When asked to “show your work,” may a student show a visual representation?

A: Yes.

Writing Topics

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Q: Who scores my students’ papers?

A:

- Nevada Educators who have received holistic and/or analytic scoring training.
- Accurate and objective scoring does not depend upon grade level taught as scorers are calibrated to a state standard and anchor papers that are exemplars for the standard.
- Many readers/scorers use both the analytic and holistic rubrics as part of instruction.
- High school educators brought analytic scoring to Nevada in the 1980s.

Q: How many people score each one of our papers?

A:

- All papers are independently double scored (HS papers are read by four scorers).
- Discrepant papers receive a third reading by a Head Reader or State Consultant.
- Discrepant scores are defined as being more than one score number apart.

Q: Is it true that all papers in one school are scored by the same two readers?

A:

- No
- Papers are batched in such a way that it would be rare that any one school’s papers would be read by the same two scorers.
- School papers are separated and batched with other papers from all over the state.
- There are two simultaneous scoring locations (north and south); so consequently, it is rare that one school’s papers are all read in one scoring location during the same scoring session.

Q: How many new readers are allowed to score in one session?

A:

- 7-18 new readers depending upon the scoring location
- New readers are placed together at the same table with a highly qualified, experienced Table Leader who reads behind them throughout the scoring session and addresses concerns and questions as they arise.
- A single paper is never scored by more than one new reader.

Q: Is it true that papers without a title receive lower scores in ideas?

A:

- No.
- Titles are read as part of the rest of the paper.
- There is no mention of titles in the scoring rubric.
- Titles if used, should reinforce the topic sentence not replace it.

Q: Is it true that papers must contain 3-5 paragraphs of 3-5 sentences each to pass? Does indenting affect a student's score?

A:

- No
- Writing should reflect paragraphing when it is appropriate.
- If paragraphing is used, indentation makes it easier to follow a student's ideas and thought processes, but paragraphing and/or indentation are not necessary to receive a passing score.
- Remember indenting is important in classroom writing.

Q: It is necessary to fill a whole writing page?

A:

- No
- Ideas or at least one idea must be developed completely.

Q: Is it all right to continue onto another page or to put lines between the other lines to create more writing space?

A:

- No
- Part of good writing is sifting out and writing what is important in the space allotment.
- Only 28 lines of writing are scored.
- An equivalent is determined for those who must type their responses due to accommodations.

Q: Is it true that a student who puts "The End" on his or her paper is scored down?

A:

- No
- But, "The End" does not take the place of a conclusion.

Q: Will a writing sample automatically receive a high score in voice if it contains similes, dialogue, adjectives, and exaggeration?

A:

- No
- These must fit the writing and be appropriately used.
- Dialogue needs narrative to give context and meaning to the conversation.
- Too many similes, adjectives, and exaggeration will ruin the impact that adding a few effective ones could make.
- Similes that do not fit and gratuitous strings of adjectives detract from the writing.

- Too much of any of these is distracting and may not be appropriate to audience and purpose.

Q: Is it true that students are marked down if they do not write in cursive?

A:

- No
- Students should be encouraged to write legibly.

Q: Is it true that if capitals at sentence beginnings, end punctuation, and basic spelling are correct within simple sentences, the student will receive a 3 in conventions?

A:

- It depends.
- Conventions go beyond capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.
- Conventions also include Standard English grammar, usage, and varied sentence structure.

Q: Is it true that if formulaic writing is used, students cannot get a passing score in organization?

A:

- No
- Organization that impedes meaning or requires the reader to fill in what is missing will receive a lower score.
- Using an expository organizational pattern for a narrative often does not work well as it interrupts the natural flow of a story or description, and thus impedes meaning.
- Starting each sentence or paragraph with an inappropriate transition often makes the piece sound like a travel itinerary or agenda.

Q: Why do some papers that receive an analytic score of 3 (4 in holistic) look different than other papers that receive the same score?

A:

- At *every* score point, regardless of the rubric, there is an ability continuum of low to high.
- As in the classroom, for example, a “C” grade typically ranges from 70% - 79%.

Q: Are conventions weighed more heavily when scoring analytically?

A:

- No. Each of the four traits is equally important for good writing.
- A low score in conventions does not automatically mean low scores in the other three areas.
- There is no established number of convention errors that a student must have in order to pass or fail.
- There is no particular punctuation mark, e.g., a semicolon, that a student must use to earn a passing score.

Q: Is practicing the writing test the best way to pass the test?

A:

- Not unless it includes timely, individual, corrective feedback so students know what to improve and how to improve it.
- There is no replacement for good instruction.

Q: How is 5th grade brainstorming conducted?

A:

- Students create and record their own list of ideas individually and silently.
- Teachers scribe student suggestions only.
- No discussion or elaboration by teachers or students allowed.
- Students add to their individual lists if they want to do so.
- Brainstorming is part of the writing process, and students should really be doing this automatically and independently each time they write.

Q: At what time of the day should the tests be administered?

A:

- Very Strong Recommendation is to begin early in the day, with all students beginning at the same time in a single school.
- Begin and finish a session either before or after a special class or lunch: a special or lunch or any other activity cannot happen in the middle of a testing session.
- Students must begin and end a session all in one sitting allowing for enough time for those who will need more than the allotted time.

Q: When does a school use an alternate prompt?

A:

- For 5th grade, if a student is absent for the entire 3 day school testing window, he or she uses the alternate prompt.
- For 8th grade, if a student is absent for the entire 2 day school testing window, he or she uses the alternate prompt.
- In either grade, if a student is present during any part of the regular school testing window (2 or 3 days depending on grade level), he or she uses the regular prompt.
- The alternate prompt is not simpler nor is there a choice as to when it can be used.
- For high school, the alternate prompt is not for make-ups. The alternate prompt is used on the required testing day and only for 12th grade or adult students in programs that take place outside of the regular school day, i.e., after 3:30 pm.

Q: Who gets to use dictionaries?

A:

- All 5th and 8th grade students may use regular standard English stand-alone, paper dictionaries.
- Thesaurus, other specialized or personalized dictionaries, or other reference materials are not allowed for any students.

- LEP students who have this accommodation, and use it as part of regular class instruction, are allowed stand alone word-for-word bilingual dictionaries that contain no explanatory information.

Q: What are the differences between the Holistic Rubric and the Analytic Rubric?

A:

- Holistic considers a paper as a whole; analytic considers a paper by each trait.
- Holistic Rubric has 6 score points with descriptors for each score point.
- Analytic Rubric has 5 score points with descriptors for score points of 1, 3, and 5.
- Though not actually described (analytic rubric), score points 2 and 4 contain parts of the other descriptors, i.e., a score of 2 contains elements of scores 1 and 3.
- Holistic uses 1 rubric, and Analytic uses 4 rubrics (one for each of the following: Idea and Content Development, Organization, Voice, Conventions).
- The rubrics look different, but the same criteria are used to score.

Q: Can all students type their rough drafts or responses?

A:

- No
- Only students who have a documented disability related need to type may do so.

Q: Can students use a “canned” or previously practiced piece?

A:

- No
- Remember students may not have access to personal items before or during testing.
- This writing runs the risk of being marked off-topic if there is no connection between the writing and the given prompt.
- If the student uses the prompt as the topic sentence, and then puts his “canned” piece in, writing often makes no sense and ideas and organization scores suffer.
- Even if the writing is a little bit close, it will suffer in ideas because the assigned prompt is not developed.
- Part of writing is addressing audience and purpose, and usually “canned” pieces do not address audience and purpose of the writing prompt.

Q: What makes state scoring objective?

A:

- All scorers must complete a standardized and comprehensive state training.
- Scorers are calibrated to anchor/exemplar papers based on ELA state standards.
- Anchors are chosen from thousands of papers from across Nevada.
- A warm up is completed as a prelude to scoring.
- Scorers are read behind several times throughout the day.
- State scorers are not influenced by knowing the students personally and witnessing the growth of ability in their classrooms.

Q: Are teachers allowed to copy their students writing assessments?

A:

- No
- Copies may be made at the administrative level **only for 5th and 8th grade** student papers.
- Such copies are to be locked up with prompts and etc. until scores are released.
- Copies are not to be scored at the school site in order to “predict” how a school will perform on the writing assessment.
- Copies must be destroyed at the end of the school year as these students are gone.
- Copies may not be kept and used as examples for subsequent years.

Ultimately, nothing can replace specific, structured and on-going writing instruction. Please be sure to check out the samples and annotations on the website.

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